

**Literary Semiotics in Hamid Reza Shahabadi's *Lullaby for the Dead Girl***

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**introduction**

Semiotics is the science of studying the hidden meanings of a text. In Ferdinand de Saussure's formulation, a linguistic sign is comprised of a signifier and a signified and the relationship between them, which creates coherence for the sign, is called signification. Linguistic signs are very important in any text and can have one or more meanings. To help interpret their texts, authors use symbols and signs in the structures of their stories. In literary and fictional texts, meaning is created endlessly because signs not only create meaning but also multiply meanings and significations.

Hamid Reza Shahabadi in his novel, *Lullaby for the Dead Girl*, makes use of literary signs and symbols extensively. The title of the novel and the elements of the story are symbols which allude to different meanings. These symbols are analyzed in this research.

**Methodology and Review of Literature**

There are many researches from a semiotic point of view in the field of children's and adolescents' literature. Ahmadi's article, "Semiotics of

imagination and metaphor in the story 'Address'" and Jamali and Sheikhi's article, "Semiotics of cover illustration on adolescents' novels" are two such researches. In "Semiotic analysis of Tajik stories for children and adolescents", the researchers study these stories from a semiotic approach by the use of the model proposed by Greimas. In "Semiotic analysis of fantastic animal characters in Persian and English children's literature", the textual signs in a number of works of children's literature are compared. One can also refer to the article "Semiotics of characterization of the cover of books for children and adolescents with the subject of Islamic Revolution and the Holy Defense against Iraq published by the Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Adolescents".

However, no studies have been undertaken on Shahabadi's *Lullaby for the Dead Girl*. In this research, by the use of a descriptive-analytical method, the characters, the setting, the objects and the title of the novel are analyzed from a semiotic point of view to reveal their implied meanings.

### **Discussion**

*Lullaby for the Dead Girl* is a social-historical novel in which a special multiplicity and a chain of significations is created by its fantasy atmosphere. The novel has a wide array of characters who reveal various sets of signs and symbols. Believable and denying characters, while entangled in paradoxes, move the story forward. Mina, Zohreh and her father and brothers are the heroes of the story. The university teacher, representatives of the parliament, the student and the worker all seek justice for the lives of the heroes of the narrative.

The unfinished complex Arghavan as the place of the narrative is the intersection of three different roads and signifies a heterogeneous and unsafe community for the hero. Located at the margin of the city, in contrast with other places in the novel, this complex shows the hero's social status. The hot and stormy desert around Qoochan represents the harsh aspect of nature which greatly affects Hakimeh's destiny. Eshgh-Abad [literary meaning "city of love"] represents another aspect of nature which implies love accompanied with bitterness and suffering.

The beautiful title *Lullaby for the Dead Girl* cultivates an array of symbolic meanings. Lullabies are usually sung for children and generate meanings of peace, sleep, comfort, welfare and love; however, in here, the lullaby is sung for a dead girl and signifies horror and sorrow. From the very beginning, this sad lullaby reveals the writer's positive attitude toward women characters since it is a symbol for seeking justice, partiality and love of the author toward the suffering and oppressed women and girls of this country.

The first level of time in the narrative is the calendar time of autumn and winter. Then everything becomes hazy and foggy. In the meantime, historical time is formed with the presence of Mirza Jafar Khan and his companions. This change amplifies anxiety, doubt and variety in the narrative. In the end, the calendar time of winter is chosen as a turning point in creating desired meanings for the author.

The multiplicity of structure levels in the narrative, the temporal breaks and changes and the paradoxes in the narrative are all signs for the disruptions of Hakimeh's comfort. They are used to describe her life of misery and her childhood filled with pain and suffering.

### **Conclusion**

The author of *Lullaby for the Dead Girl* has extensively used semiotic theory and symbolism. Analyzing the symbols in the title and the text of the novel reveals that the title, the setting, the characters and the objects all play symbolic roles in the story and show the author's ideological point of view. Injustice, oppression, sexual inequality and marginalization and victimization are the main themes of the story.

The title of the novel, in line with other symbols in the narrative, reveals a general sad picture of the hero's life. It shows the hero's characteristics such as her gender and her age, as well as the dark theme of the story.

Multiple times of the narrative such as the calendar, historical and transcendental times, all help in creating a paradoxical, sad and despairing atmosphere and reveal the hero's despair, depression, loneliness and bitter silence. Objects, even the foodstuff, have a wide significance in the narrative and are symbols of poverty and deprivation. Color red is included among the symbolic aspects of the story to foreshadow the disillusionment and victimization of the main character and the bitter end of the story.

**Keywords:** Theory of semiotics, *Lullaby for the Dead Girl*, Hamid Reza Shahabadi, character, place, time, title.

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